

State superintendent's agenda here: School achievement gaps

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State school superintendent Tony Evers. / File/Gannett
Wisconsin Media

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See how achievement gaps have changed with an interactive graphic and database online at [greenbaypressgazette.com](http://www.greenbaypressgazette.com).

Giving each individual student attention — which could include asking them how last night's soccer game went — is a start to closing the achievement gap, a local educator says.

helps them achieve, and one way teachers and school staff can encourage that interest is showing genuine interest in students on a personal level.

"You need to look at the whole child, not just the academic piece," Spychalla said. "I have teachers who attend baseball games, or who follow up on how a dance recital went."

INTERACTIVE GRAPHIC: [Compare Green Bay schools' achievement gap trends](#)

She is one of 17 educators from across the state selected by state School Superintendent Tony Evers to join his Task Force on Wisconsin's Achievement Gap. The group met Thursday in Green Bay to discuss strategies and recommendations, and also were scheduled to meet in Madison and Milwaukee. A final report is expected in June.

Spychalla has served at Keller and Lincoln elementary schools in Green Bay and helped close achievement gaps at those schools.

"Relationships really are key," she said. "Relationships among staff in buildings, with parents, students and the community. We need to let kids know we care about them."

It's suggestions like these Evers hopes to share with school administrators looking to close the gap.

"If we want to progress economically and socially, we have to address gaps," he said. The DPI plans to distribute guidelines throughout the state with specific measures, which Evers said could include cultural training or ways to help students coming from poverty.

Evers formed the committee because Wisconsin had the biggest achievement gap between black and white students among states last year. Poor students also generally performed worse than their peers on standardized tests, according to the state Department of Public Instruction.

Scrutiny on standardized test scores increased two years ago when the state began releasing report

cards rating schools based on a variety of factors, including achievement gaps.

A recent Press-Gazette Media analysis found that Green Bay's poorest students continue falling farther behind their peers in nearly every core subject area despite concerted efforts to reverse the trend for more than a decade.

The problem likely reflects the ballooning poverty rate among families with children in the state's fourth largest school district, according to local and state education leaders. More than 60 percent of Green Bay's 21,000 students are considered poor — the 28th highest among Wisconsin's 424 school districts.

Twenty-two percent of poor students in Green Bay scored at proficient or advanced levels in math this year on the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Examination, compared with 58 percent of their peers.

Fewer than 15 percent of poor students across the district earned proficient reading scores compared to 44 percent of their peers.